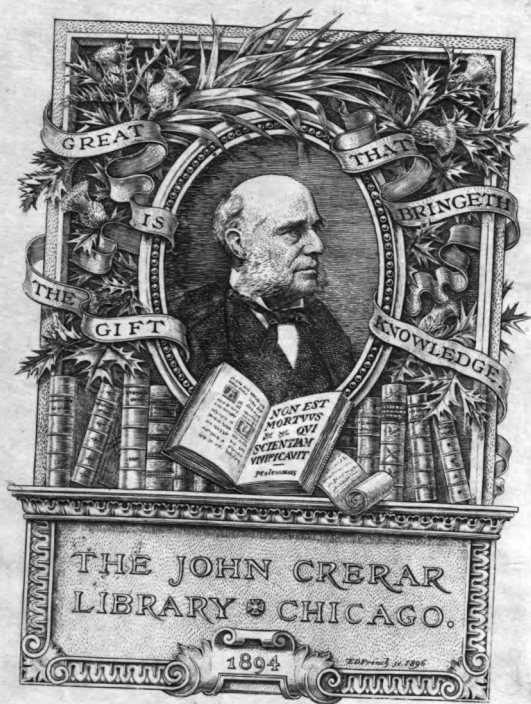

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BARBED WIRE DISEASE :

A Psychological Study of the Prisoner of War

BY

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M.D. Basle, M.R.C.S. Eng.

Translated from the German, with Additions by the Author

With an Introductory Chapter by
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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

By S. A. KINNIER WILSON, M.A., B.Sc., M.D.Ed.,
F.R.C.P.LOND.

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Physician, National Hospital, Queen Square, London.*

“Laugh, oh laugh loud, all ye who long ago
Adventure found in gallant company !
Safe in stagnation ; laugh, laugh bitterly,
While on this filthiest backwater of time's flow,
Drift we and rot till something set us free ! ”

(Lieut. Harvey, in *Gloucestershire Friends*).

IN this War of wars the herding together of prisoners taken in fair fight, and of interned civilians, has been on a scale commensurate with the gigantic numbers of the combatants in a struggle such as the world has never before seen and will never see again. As a result there have been provided all the essentials for a colossal experiment in psychology—in the psychology of the crowd as much as of the individual. With some four or five millions of people, of all ranks, races, sorts and conditions, spending years of their lives in prison camps problems of a unique nature have been forced on public attention. Dr. A. L. Vischer's essay on the

psychology of prisoners of war is a meritorious contribution to a subject to which, notwithstanding the abundance of the material, comparatively little study, synthetic or analytic, has as yet been given.

Prison literature has always exercised a certain fascination on the mind, but from the memoirs of Baron Trenck to those of Dostoiewsky, from "To Althea from Prison," to the "Ballad of Reading Gaol," the interest resides less in the matter of the narrative than in the revelation of the individual's reaction to his environment. To judge by single contributions merely, this reaction of the prisoner to his surroundings depends more on his own character, temperament, disposition, call it what you will, than on extrinsic elements; one may sing that—

" Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage,"

while another may take on the colour of his environment, chameleon-like, and depict in the most sombre tones the soul-deadening effect of matter on mind. It should be understood, at the same time, as Dr. Vischer does well in pointing out, that much of what has hitherto been classed as prison literature has emanated from abnormal mentality. The *graffiti* of the criminal on the walls of his cell may reveal mental anomalies quite as clearly as do the wordy tomes or *petits papiers* of the hopeless lunatic.

In two chief respects, it would appear, the life of the war prison camp differs from that of the civil

prison; it is lived by men, the vast majority of whom have been in full mental and physical health, and it is not lived in solitude or in approximate seclusion. Hence factors are at work whose influence in the ordinary prison or penal settlement is less obvious, if not, indeed, negligible. Dr. Vischer, who has made out an excellent *prima facie* case for the study of these factors, enumerates them as follows:

- (1) Complete absence of any chance of being alone;
- (2) ignorance of the duration of the captivity;
- (3) irregularity of communication from home;
- (4) "more than anything else, the barbed wire winds like a red thread through the mental processes" of the prisoner.

The other factors that he mentions are common to all internment, civil or otherwise, such as the restrictions, rules, regulations, limited space, monotonous food, and absence of means for sexual intercourse.

Granting, then, the reality of these unusual features in the life of the interned, the next step is to appraise their value as predisposing or exciting factors in the development of abnormal mental states. It is held that they give rise to a syndrome or symptom-complex characterized by irritability, difficulty in concentrating, restlessness, failure of memory, moodiness, depression, and unpleasant dreams. Such, according to the author, is the nature of the neurosis which has been dignified with the name of "barbed-wire disease." Objection to the nomenclature on the ground of its artificiality is

relatively immaterial if it can be shown that the condition is new, or at least hitherto unrecognized, and that it constitutes a clinical entity, otherwise we should be adding unnecessarily to the already unwieldy group of the neuroses and psychoneuroses.

In this connection one must admit that although a morbid condition may not be specifically new its occurrence under a novel set of circumstances may justify its being linked, nosologically, with these circumstances, for descriptive or other purposes. We have a precedent in the exaggerated development of certain neuroses consequent on the widespread adoption by home and foreign governments of the principle of compensation for accidents. Traumatic neurasthenia, a condition well enough known, was dubbed, as far as one sub-group was concerned, "railway spine,"—an expression comparable to "barbed-wire neurosis," and equally convenient—or inconvenient. Again, more recent investigation has resulted in the separation of another group graphically described as the "fight-for-compensation neurosis" (Rentenkampfneurose), which, indeed, is an accurate epithet to apply to not a few instances of traumatic neurasthenia. In the course of the war itself another conception has arisen with a similarly fashioned *ad hoc* terminology, viz., "shell shock."

The advantage of such terms is their temporary appositeness; the disadvantage, that it may be fairly said of them they create distinctions without

differences. "Shell shock" is dying a natural death; as already indicated, its novelty consisted in its etiology and not in its symptomatology. And this will probably be the case with the "Stacheldraht Krankheit"; at least, it is legitimate to hope so.

At the same time, the term will really have served a useful purpose if it succeeds in directing attention to one of the most important and serious aspects of life in war prison camps, and for this reason we may examine a little more closely the descriptions and conclusions of Dr. Vischer.

The only way to accumulate adequate data for a consideration of the question is by personal investigation among the interned and by perusal of camp magazines or journals so far as they are accessible, and of narratives written by escaped prisoners. Dr. Vischer has utilized all these sources of information and hence has a solid basis to work on. It is to be regretted, I think, that he has not been able, apparently, to consult the major part of the literature of life in war prison camps that has appeared in English. He quotes from only one English book, very briefly, whereas he makes large quotations from German and French writings. That this may conceivably have coloured his views to some extent is a point to be noted. For the purposes of this introduction, I have read every available book on the subject of English origin, and have also conversed with a large number of returned prisoners of

war as they have passed through one of the military hospitals to which I have been attached. I am, therefore, to some extent in a position to amplify or modify certain of Dr. Vischer's conclusions.

It may be said at once that English writers complain just as much as the German and French of the absence of privacy and of consequent irritability. One or two quotations will suffice, though the number could easily be multiplied.

"We became sick of the sight of one another as even the best of friends do under such abnormal conditions. For variety I would walk round the enclosure with a Russian. Neither of us had the faintest idea what the other said, but it was a change. . . . The monotony of the wire was terrible. . . . There was so little to talk about. We knew nothing, and could only speculate. . . ." (Pearson, "The Escape of a Princess Pat.")

"In the afternoons we slept; there was nothing else to do. The few books we possessed had been read and re-read over and over again. Our tempers were so irritable that we could not converse without quarrelling; and, after all, what was there to talk about? . . . We had had no fresh news for months and months . . . Sometimes—very rarely—we did get hold of a bit of news, and then we discussed it from every point of view, and lived on it for days; lived on it, in fact, until there was nothing of it

left, and any hopes it had aroused faded like a mirage in the desert." (Surgeon E. C. Holtom, R.N. ; "Two Years' Captivity in German East Africa.")

That people closely and intimately associated for a time, with no chance of escape from each other, should "get on each other's nerves" is a commonplace. In the accounts of their Antarctic experiences given by Scott and by Shackleton illustrations of this phenomenon are recorded. On the other hand, the influence of this factor of inability to escape from the herd must vary to some extent with the degree of civilization and education of the individuals concerned. The average Englishman undoubtedly prefers any arrangement which caters obviously or subtly, for the feeling of seclusion—which is not synonymous with exclusiveness; the greater the number of small tables in a modern restaurant the more popular it is. He likes to be in a crowd but not of it; in fact, nowhere does he feel more keenly this delight of being alone than when he is by himself where there are others. The more acutely, one may suppose, he suffers from the deprivation in the herd life of the war prison camp where privacy is unknown and seclusion a mockery. No doubt many French, Belgians and Germans had exactly the same feeling of disgust at constantly rubbing elbows with their fellow prisoners, as may be gathered from some of Dr. Vischer's quotations. The Russians, in Pearson's experience, "were a

cheerful lot, considering everything, little given to thinking of their situation, and not blessed by any great love of country, nor perhaps the pleasantest recollections of it, and to that extent at least appeared to be comparatively satisfied, even under ill-treatment." The narratives of life at Ruhleben show that the English, mainly, "made the best of it" by the formation of "clubs," and to this extent helped to mitigate the discomfort of absence of privacy.

In addition to irritability, it would appear from a survey of the literature that what one would call technically a condition of cyclothymia is not infrequent. Alternation of moods often occurs, elation being followed by corresponding depression. Despondency in greater or less degree, in longer or shorter bouts, has been common enough. But in very many cases it has been transient and mild. Even under the most appalling circumstances the spirit of the prisoner has proved invincible, over and over again. One of our men, who escaped from a German prison camp only to be recaptured when four miles from the Dutch frontier, was rewarded by thirty days' solitary confinement in a dark cell. Unspeakably cruel as this treatment was, what does he say of it?

"I cannot remember that I brooded much. Rather I let my mind run out as a tired sleeper might, which was no doubt fortunate for me. My family were greatly in my thoughts. . . .

The slow starving was the worst, to my mind, and after that the loss of sleep. I tried not to think and did all the gymnastic drill I knew, even to standing on my hands in the darkness of the cell. I knew that if I gave up it was all over."

Methods innumerable were adopted by the British at Ruhleben and elsewhere to kill the ennui and to stifle pessimism. Not enough has been made, I think, of the amusing trifles of camp life and their power to detract materially from the searing and depressing monotony of camp existence—a power out of all proportion to the intrinsic importance of the incidents.

"The men interned in Ruhleben had reason to be grateful for what I believe is a characteristic of our race—a saving sense of humour. Even in the darkest days of the first winter, a defiant gaiety—entirely different in its nature from a cheerful resignation—characterized the attitude of the greater part of the men in camp." (Wallace Ellison, "Escaped!")

But when all is said and done, the contention of Dr. Vischer remains true enough in its main outlines, that after two or three years of camp life a proportion of the *internés* sank into a settled melancholy which took the place of hope and cheerfulness as, if the simile be allowed, sclerosis takes the place of injured nerve parenchyma. This seems to have been the case with individuals of all races

and all conditions. The following quotation from Wallace Ellison is remarkable in that by an undesigned coincidence it sums up nearly all the features of the barbed-wired neurosis as defined by Dr. Vischer. It should, however, be stated that Ellison's position was doubly distressing, for he had made a series of attempts at escape, had been on each occasion recaptured, and had been rewarded with solitary confinement and other punishments which might have broken the spirit of the strongest.

“My health was seriously impaired; my nerves, at times, were in shocking condition; my memory had begun to suffer, and, in spite of all my efforts to be, and remain, defiantly cheerful, there came hours when I was overwhelmed by fits of gloom and despondency, against which I battled in vain. And I was by no means an isolated case. My friends were similarly affected. We grew strangely irritable. The best of friends quarrelled violently with each other, and without cause. We had long since abandoned the little debates in which we used to indulge, in the early days of our prison life. Apart from the fact that each man knew his neighbour's point of view from A to Z, we were none of us in a fit condition to argue good-temperedly. Few of us were able to read books, and we spent most of the day wandering aimlessly about from cell to cell

in search of the congenial companion we so seldom found."

Here we have precisely the irritability, difficulty in concentrating, restlessness, failure of memory, moodiness and depression specified by the author.

After spending two years in prison in Berlin Ellison was transferred to Ruhleben once more and was thus able to compare the condition of the men of the camp with their state two years previously, i.e., after approximately one year of captivity.

"Life in Ruhleben, however, replete as the camp was with opportunities for work and diversion of all kinds, had not been without its effect on many of the interned during my two years' absence. Particularly sad was the marked effect it had had on the minds of some of the fine young boys whom I had known and liked when the camp was founded. Quite a number whom I saw were suffering from various degrees of melancholia and depression of spirits; but on the whole the men—old and young—were standing the strain remarkably well."

Another quotation (from a magazine article) is to the following effect :—

"Some of our party of eleven British had been prisoners since Mons, and they were in a very bad way. The poor food, the lack of the fundamental necessities of the human frame, the terrible monotony of the continual barbed

wire, the same faces round them, mostly unfriendly, all combined to have a most depressing effect not only upon their bodies, but upon their minds. Many of them will never be of any use again."

Enough, then, perhaps, has been given by way of illustration from British sources to corroborate in its main features the general picture furnished by Dr. Vischer of the neurosis of war prison camps, and to show, supplementing his French and German examples, that apparently no camp and no race have been altogether free from it. One factor in its production is not, as far as I have observed, mentioned by Dr. Vischer, no doubt because of his desire to be strictly impartial, but no one who reads the English narratives can hesitate for a moment in assigning much importance to its agency. I refer to inadequate food. Our men were, as a simple matter of fact, in a large number of instances—though by no means universally—on starvation diet, and the effect of this on reducing physical and therefore psychical resistance cannot be overestimated. If underfeeding be held as a cause of the development of the barbed-wire neurosis it cannot, of course, be regarded as *the* cause, for it did not obtain in prison camps in this country. We are thus led to the conclusion that a number of factors were at work in its production, to this extent substantiating Dr. Vischer's views.

He, in his turn, assigns "vital importance" to

sexual deprivation ; the prisoners are deprived of normal sexual intercourse, and they live solely in association with men. Practically no hint of this can be gathered from the English accounts, except in single remarks or by reading between the lines. One says :—

“ The absence of women *and children* [italics mine] was one of the hardest things to bear.”

Another : “ There was a certain amount of vice in this camp.”

Another : “ When I was met in Holland by a number of charming English women I was asked by one of them, after I had told my story, ‘ What were you looking forward to most in your life of freedom ? ’ I paused for a moment and then said : ‘ To hear an English-woman speak. ’ ‘ How strange ! All escaped prisoners say the same thing. ’ ”

A friend of mine, who has lived in Central Africa for a number of years, assured me that when a little company of white men got together for a Christmas dinner their one topic of conversation was English women, their one longing to see a white woman’s face, to hear the rustle of an English skirt.

It may well be that the sexual factor plays a more significant part than can be estimated merely by a perusal of published narratives ; for obvious reasons more is likely to be spoken than to be written about this. At the same time one is not inclined to regard it as “ vital,” but rather as

contributory. In many conversations with returned prisoners of war I have touched on this point and have not been able to substantiate Dr. Vischer's contention that sexual deprivation is of fundamental importance.

From a neurological standpoint it would be interesting to endeavour to ascertain whether those who broke down under the strain of confinement were in any way potentially neurotic or neurasthenic, in the sense that a study of their family history might reveal neuropathic antecedents. Information on this matter would be of considerable value. There is no inherent improbability in the hypothesis ; quite the reverse. Out of the millions who have undergone the strain and welter of intensive fighting, who are those that have suffered from "shell shock"? In the first place, only a proportion, while the majority have gone through identical experiences unscathed. And what group do they form? A good deal of evidence is forthcoming to suggest that they are predisposed by heredity or familial antecedents. That they have broken down has been in not a few instances surprising, no doubt, but the factors producing the collapse have been exceptional. Many of the sufferers, had they been allowed to follow the even tenor of their way in civilian life, would never, one may believe, have broken down, but their organism was not adapted to twentieth century warfare. Similarly, one may postulate non-adaptability on the part of the

sufferers from barbed-wire neurosis, and predisposition of some sort, however one may choose to express it. Reliable statistics would be instructive and informative in this respect.

In any case, some break down under the strain and others do not. Identical agencies are at work, but the effects on the individual are variable in the extreme. Dr. Vischer gives us some figures for the proportion of those who develop the barbed-wire neurosis; naturally, the lay writers of books and magazine articles on prison life, describing their own experiences, are not, as a rule, able to speak except in vague terms of the relative numbers of the immune and the infected. Witness the following :—

“It is surprising what a difference the effect of a long term of imprisonment has on various people. To anyone gifted with the smallest powers of observation, the constant changes and rapid transformation of ideas and stand-points in the small world of prison necessarily came with interest. It is a strange fact, but nevertheless true, that some prisoners, forgetting that a prison existence is only temporary and entirely unnatural, seem to think that things matter in such a place, and that the happenings and views of the outside world do not directly concern them.

“A long spell of such an existence changes a man more in character than the same period

spent in the ordinary course of life. Some are tempered in the fires of such a test, while there are others . . .” (Capt. Caunter, “Thirteen Days.”)

This leads to a consideration of another point; are there grounds for Dr. Vischer’s statements that “probably very few prisoners who have been over six months in camp are quite free from the disease,” that “many” (of the four or five millions who have been in prison camps) “will return to their homes with a damaged mentality,” that “hundreds of thousands” are crippled, that “only too many will never be happy again, even to the end of their days”?

I am bound to say that my experience of returned prisoners does not quite coincide with the opinion expressed in the second of these statements; those with “damaged mentality” have been few and far between. With a return to normal environment the mists of the barbed-wire neurosis have cleared away with gratifying rapidity; improvement of the physical condition of the prisoners has resulted in speedy re-integration of the psychical mal-functionings, such as they have been. As for the first statement, opinions differ. Dr. Vischer himself quotes the experience of Mott, that hysteria and severe neurasthenia are seldom seen in prisoners’ camps. What is wanted is expert evidence on the matter. The author, as he admits, is not a mental expert, but a departmental surgeon. It must not

depression, restlessness, &c., are symptoms common to many abnormal conditions; that it is not a well-delimited clinical entity. The fact will remain that the peculiar circumstances of war prison-camp life, as of other somewhat analogous states of existence well described by Dr. Vischer, do give rise in certain cases to mental abnormalities which are practically always of the same type, and for that reason we are justified in speaking, contingently and for convenience, of a "barbed-wire neurosis."

Those who come to the conclusion that this neurosis has been the exception, and not the rule, in the case of our own men, at least, may ask what has kept the spirit alive amid the dreadful surroundings of many of these places. Wallace Ellison says:—

"Looking back on my prison life, I am convinced that I was kept mentally fresh by the constant planning to effect my escape."

Yet those who did escape formed but a trifling proportion of the whole.

In Ruhleben there came eventually to be established what Bishop Bury called, not without reason, the "Ruhleben University." Hundreds of men have come home who have thus added materially to their store of knowledge and acquirements. Many, it is known, have been enabled to pass matriculation examinations as a result of these studies. Opportunities for intellectual work of this

kind must have been a godsend to many, so that the description of Ruhleben as the "City of Futility" must have been peened by a cynic or some one heavily weighted with "affect," in the Freudian sense. I have already referred to the sense of humour of the average Englishman, numerous illustrations of which are to be found almost without exception in the English narratives, and which on one notable occasion elicited the unwilling admission from a pompous German officer of high rank inspecting Ruhleben Camp—"Diese Engländer haben wenigstens Humor."

Another feature in the character of those who withstood successfully the hardships of these unspeakable years has been their philosophical attitude towards it all. Captain Caunter was interned in Crefeld Camp for two and a half years, and he states that—

"Some prisoners managed to continue playing cards from their first days in prison until I left, and I suppose will continue to do so without ceasing until the day of their release."

He was eventually transferred at the end of that time to Schwarmstedt Camp, and makes the following remarkable comment on the occasion:—

"Extraordinary as it may seem, we were positively annoyed at leaving; far from being keen on seeing new places and settling down in new environments, the majority would have

preferred to remain in the same old groove for the whole time of their imprisonment. Time seems to go by much more quickly when nothing happens to mark its flight. The two and a half years spent in that prison had slipped by without milestones, and it was extremely hard to realize what the two and a half years really meant. One sometimes felt that life previous to the war was really the invention of a dream. It often seemed to one that 'prison' was the natural state of existence and anything outside of it unnatural. Perhaps the animals at the Zoo have the same impression of the outside world." (Captain Caunter, "Thirteen Days.")

I cannot help feeling that more than a sense of humour this adaptability of the individual, this adjustment to his surroundings and to the general situation, this philosophical outlook on the hard facts of internment, must have been the means of saving the majority from the clutches of the neurosis that was officially recognized in the Hague Conference in 1917. "Make the best of it," was the philosophical motto of all who won through successfully in spite of physical sufferings and mental torments.

Dr. Vischer's little book concludes with a plea for the internment of prisoners in a neutral country, and he expresses his thankfulness at the share which Switzerland has taken in mitigating the prolonged isolation of the war prisoner. He may well be

proud of the splendid example set by his native country; should the whirligig of time bring a repetition of conflict only good can result by wide publicity of the medical facts connected with the internment of prisoners of war on a huge scale and with the problem of their treatment.

A few comments have been made on Dr. Vischer's account by an Englishman well versed in prisoners' camp life, and added as footnotes to the text with the letter X.

BARBED WIRE DISEASE.

During the course of the World War it has been found that nervous disorders frequently occur among prisoners of war. Prisoners who have been exchanged on account of severe injuries or who have been interned in neutral countries bear witness that many of their comrades suffer severe mental strain, while they themselves often give clear indications of neurosis. Many prisoners, moreover, betray ill-health in their letters and cards to relatives.

This perhaps will not often strike the casual visitor, who is chiefly interested in the hygienic arrangements of the camps, and passes heedlessly by the mental life of the inmates. Even the medical officers, who may have to supervise the health of a camp for months on end, often arrive at quite negative results in their judgment as to the mental condition of their patients. Dr. Mörchen,¹ Medical Officer to the Prisoners' Camp at Darmstadt, reports in an essay ("Traumatic Neuroses and Prisoners of War") that from a scientific point of view there is in a prisoners' camp deplorably little material

¹ Münchner medizinische Wochenschrift, Vol. 63, No. 33.

of interest to the specialist in mental diseases. The well-known English neurologist, F. W. Mott, in an essay published in January, 1918,² arrives at the conclusion that hysteria and severe neurasthenia are seldom seen in prisoners' camps. Somewhat different is the opinion of Dr. F. Lust,³ who writes that, in contrast with war hysteria, which is seldom found among prisoners of war and interned civilians, a neurasthenic symptom complex often appears in prison camps. This he attributes principally to two causes, sexual excesses and immoderate smoking. C. H. Julliard, of Geneva, has described a severe form of neurasthenia affecting an Austrian prisoner of war, and compares it with concussion neurosis.⁴

For a long time I worked in prison camps of various countries, talked with hundreds of prisoners and came to know many of them personally, so that I was able to obtain an insight into the life and doings of the camps. In the following pages an attempt is made to give some of my observations. I must, however, first premise,⁵ that as Departmental Surgeon I have no claim to an exceptional

² F. W. Mott, Two Addresses on War Psycho-neurosis. *Lancet*, Jan. 26th, 1918.

³ F. Lust, *Kriegsneurosen u. Kriegsgefangene*. *Münchener med. Wochenschrift* No. 52, 1916.

⁴ Julliard, *La Captivité*. *Revue médicale de la Suisse Romande*. July, 1917.

⁵ Prof. Robert Bing, of Basel, has offered much valuable information.

knowledge of mental disease. My object is to draw the attention of psychologists and neurologists to a problem well worth thorough investigation, and to ventilate a subject of great social importance. For the World War has driven between four and five millions of people into prison camps, and many of them on the conclusion of peace will return to their homes with a damaged mentality. Europe will thus be infiltrated with individuals of abnormal psychical tendencies, who will not presumably be without influence on the collective psychology of the community.

We must therefore inquire to what extent we are breaking fresh ground, and whether we have to deal with new manifestations or with those already familiar.

EFFECTS OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

It is common knowledge that mental disorders are very prevalent in convict settlements and prisons. During imprisonment many forms of insanity break out which before lay dormant; this is particularly the case in dementia praecox. Other types, such as general paralysis, may be first diagnosed during imprisonment, but the symptoms and progress of the complications which follow give clear evidence of the nature of the disease.

During prolonged captivity many prisoners begin to believe that they are being unjustly treated, and make all manner of protests and

petitions. A frequent sequence among prisoners is as follows: "Gradually or as a result of a sudden revelation with or without hallucinations, patients believe themselves innocent, and acquitted or pardoned. As in reality they are not released they develop ideas of persecution in respect of their surroundings and of the authorities. Hallucinations of the various senses, especially those of hearing, taste, smell, make the delusions appear all the more real, and are reinforced by mistaken recollections and dreams of severe ill-treatment." Then follows sometimes an intense state of fear and even the impulse to suicide. Here we have an example of acute delusional melancholia.*

These symptoms appear most frequently at the end of a few months, seldom after the end of a year. Solitary confinement, with which we are here concerned, is associated with a number of circumstances exhausting to the mentality. The food is monotonous and scanty, exercise insufficient, fresh air lacking; the events during the course of the trial and the sentence itself have their after effects; personal freedom is lost, and finally solitude gives infinite leisure to brood and reflect. At the same time it must be remembered that in dealing

* Bleuler, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*. Berlin, 1910, Seite 376. Kraepelin, *Psychiatrie, ein Lehrbuch*. Leipzig 1899, Seite 72. Gutsch, *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie*, XXIX, 1. Kirn, *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie*, XLV, 1.

with convicts one is concerned largely with the mentally abnormal. It would therefore not be wise to conclude from the above observations that solitary confinement would react in the same way upon mentally healthy individuals. It is, however, certain that solitude and isolation may be considered the main factors in producing the disease.

Solitary imprisonment stands in contrast with war imprisonment in masses, with which we will now deal.

EFFECTS OF CONFINEMENT IN MASS.

A number of people, mostly healthy and young, are robbed of their freedom for an indefinite period and immured in a camp. The prisoner is restricted in all his habits; his space is limited; rules are laid down and must be promptly obeyed; the same food is put before him day after day at the same time; he is only allowed to write once⁷ a week, and then not as he would like; he is separated from his wife and has no means of sexual intercourse; he is tortured by perpetual longing which cannot be satisfied. Then he is continually thrown back on the same companions, from whom there is no escape. He must renounce or change all his personal habits. All the affairs of his

⁷ In internment camps in England letters were allowed twice a week.—X.

life are open to observation. His letters must be handed in open, and all his needs must be satisfied in public. He can never be alone.

The following are from the writings of prisoners :—

LAGEREINSAMKEIT.*

Kein Plätzchen in der Hütte,
Kein Fuss breit Platz im Freien,
Wo du nur auf Sekunden
Mal könntest einsam sein.
Im ganzen Lager findet
Man nicht ein Fleckchen Erd',
Von dem man sagen könnte:
Hier bist du ungestört,
Nicht mal im Waschhaus ist man
Allein, auch nicht mal dort,
Wo sonst in allen Ländern
Nur einer ist am Ort.
Stets wimmelt es von Leuten,
Sogar des Nachts kannst du,
Weil deine Nachbarn schnarchen,
Nicht finden deine Ruh'.
Das ist das Lagerleben
Von dem sich sagt die Welt:
Die haben's wirklich prächtig,
Um die ist's gut bestellt.

CAMP SOLITUDE.*

Not a tiny place in the hut,
Not an inch of room in the open
Where for a solitary moment
One may be alone.

* Lager-Echo, Journal of the Civilian Prisoners' Camp. Knockaloe, No. 9, 26 Sept., 1917.

Not a spot of earth to be found
Of which one might truly say
Here one is undisturbed.
Not even in the wash-house
Is one alone, not even there
Where one *should* be alone.
People are swarming everywhere,
One cannot sleep at night
Because the neighbours snore.
This is the life of the camp
Of which the neighbours say,
“ They have a real good time,
And they are the lucky ones.”

The well-known French author, Gaston Riou,* who was for nearly a year in a German prison, writes as follows:—

“ L'on dort, l'on s'habille, l'on mange, l'on joue, l'on se promène, l'on regarde si l'on n'a pas de poux sous le poil, l'on fait ses besoins, l'on rêve, l'on s'indigne, l'on s'attendrit, l'on caresse les chères reliques qu'on a cachées dans son sac, l'on s'isole en soi-même, tout cela en compagnie. Que je comprends le mot de saint Bernard, se mot de conventuel: O beata solitudo, sola beatitudo! Parfois, le matin, au réveil—ce réveil sans noblesse, plein de jurons, où les mêmes voix glapissent les mêmes platitudes, dans la même sempiternelle buée d'ennui stérile—il me prend une nausée! Il me semble que j'ai du relent de foule, du suint de bétail humain, dans tous les interstices de l'âme . . . s'ils allaient finir les caquets stériles, les considérations stratégiques, les disputes, les gémissements, tout ce qu'une foule mécontente exhale, le long des

* Gaston Riou, *Journal d'un simple soldat*. Paris 1916.

heures vaines, l'ennui animal et de mélancolie ! Oh, ce rongement de deux mois dans la termitière. . . . Oui je le sais maintenant, vivre entre hommes, rien qu'entre hommes, tous les jours, toutes les nuits, cœur à cœur, bec à bec, griffe à griffe, sans activité, sans solitude, sans la compagnie de femmes—c'est autre solitude,—oui, c'est cela le purgatoire ! ”

A third man writes¹⁰ :—

“ There are many things of which we can see and hear too much, but most of all our dear companions. In despair, thousands of us have wished ourselves far away on a mountain top. Solitude ! Music of the spheres for a prisoner of war who has dragged out two or three years amidst a swarm of men, behind double rows of wire-fencing. Oh ! only to be out of this crowded desert. Just for ten minutes to be on a solitary storm-tossed mountain top, on the chilliest glacier, in a mad whirlwind,—anywhere, even where danger lies, to get away from the sight and sound and smell of mankind, and to be able to think one's own thoughts. Here it is like an ant-heap (a nest of termites, as Riou calls it), a hive of bees. . . . This long period of the closest contact finally reduces one to look on one's companions as on the dismembered carcasses in a butcher's shop. . . . Our characters are now like a book that all can read, and the pages are soiled from constant handling.”

All this continues for an indefinite period. In contrast with the criminal who knows to the day and hour the length of his imprisonment and can tick off each day, the prisoner of war

¹⁰ Lager Echo, Knockaloe, No. 9.

remains in complete uncertainty of the duration of his imprisonment. Not only does he search the newspaper anxiously for signs foretelling peace, but he hopes that before the end of the war he may be interned in a neutral country. His whole mind is concentrated on these hopes of liberty, fluctuating according to real or imagined possibilities of deliverance.

“ Le captif ne connaît qu’un seul mot, un seul: Quand? Le même cri toujours s’exhale de nos tombes: Quand nous en irons-nous? Quand nous en irons nous? ” ¹¹

A considerable part of the prisoner’s mind is occupied in waiting for home news, for letters and parcels that mostly appear at irregular intervals. The restrictions on his usual habits continually obtrude themselves on his consciousness in all possible ways, and finally occupy his whole mental life.

More than anything else, the barbed wire winds like a red thread through his mental processes. With hypnotic gaze his mind’s eye is fixed on this obstacle.

“ We live in a kingdom of thorns, and the points that prick us on all sides are to us like a nightmare. Do you imagine that these thorny obstacles that hem us in on all sides are soothing to our spirits? Make the experiment, and imagine a picture of a man pointing a formidable revolver at you in such a way that from whatever angle you look at the picture, you stare down the black muzzle. Hang up this picture in

¹¹ Jean Trarieux, *Le Livre des jours monotones* (Pages de Captivité). Paris, 1915.

your sitting-room, a copy of it in your bedroom, and another in your office. At the end of twenty-four hours you will take a hatchet and give that man such a blow that, dumbfounded, he will drop the murderous weapon. Three times you will strike, and then you will sweep up the fragments and cast them on the rubbish-heap. Physically, the prisoner is powerless. But in spirit he gnaws unceasingly at the roots of the thorny hedge." ¹²

The barbed wire provokes opposition. The prisoner feels compelled to kick against it. He puts himself on the defensive and starts to repine and complain, not only against the camp routine and the authorities, but also against his friends and relations. This he does not by speech alone. Many record their complaints in the form of a diary or essay, or in letters.

Gaston Riou writes:—

“ Pourquoi donc des gens qui n'ont jamais tenu une plume éprouvent-ils le besoin de rédiger l'histoire de leur campagne et de leur long ‘cafard’ de captivité? Est-ce que pour se divertir de l'ennui? Est-ce que par un obscur besoin de confession? Ou estiment-ils les circonstances de leur vie de guerre si exceptionnelles, qu'elles leurs paraissent mériter les honneurs, pour eux extraordinaires, du mémorial! ”

The journals¹³ which are published in nearly every camp are the chief mediums for such

¹² Lager Echo, Knockaloe, No. 7, 18th August, 1917.

¹³ The journals in British prison camps do not appear to contain such introspective material as the German journals, and are more humorous and cheerful in tone.—X.

effusions. It can be felt that they simply *had* to be written. It is particularly remarkable that prisoners of various nations depict their fate in the same way, often using the same similes. The two following poems are good illustrations :—

LA MORT DE L'OISEAU.¹⁴

L'enfant avait placé l'oiseau dans une cage
Et, pour que la prison fût plus douce, captif
Dont le cœur angoissé, douloureux et craintif
Se lamentait tout bas sur son triste esclavage,
Il avait dépouillé les buissons du bocage
De leurs plus belles fleurs, et jusqu'au soin tardif
Il avait contemplé de son regard pensif
Le charmant prisonnier au merveilleux plumage !
Il avait prodigué le millet le plus blond,
Les graines et les fruits, le savoureux mouron,
Les insectes brillants aux teintes chatoyantes,
Pour tenter l'appétit et adoucir le sort
Du doux chantre des bois, amant du libre essor
Dont la voix sanglotait dans les nuits
odorantes . . .

Mais, quand l'aube revint, l'oiselet était mort.

A. S. B.

The following poem was written by a German poet :—

ERINNERUNGEN.¹⁵

Vor den Pfählen, drahtumspinnen, grünlich schil-
lernd in den Schwingen,
Sitzt ein Star im Licht der Sonnen und lässt laut
sein Lied erklingen.
“ Ich bin frei ! ” Aus kleiner Kehle trotz es
schmetternd—und im Innern

¹⁴ Prisoner's Pie, L'assiette sans beurre. Journal of the Prisoners' Camp, Krefeld No. 3.

Meiner abgestorbenen Seele regt sich zitternd ein
 Erinnern.
 Einst vor langen, langen Jahren legte ich mich
 auf die Lauer,
 Fing mit List mir einen Staren und ich setzte
 ihn ins Bauer.
 Auf der Stange sass er brütend, sanglos, ohne sich
 zu rühren;
 Schmeichelnd suchte ich, dann wütend, ihn zum
 Singen zu verführen,
 Doch vergebens. Es gelang nicht, wie ich ihn
 auch immer quälte,
 Und er sprang nicht und er sang nicht, weil die
 süsse Freiheit fehlte.
 Jahre hielt ich ihn gefangen, herzlos sah ich ihn
 verderben,
 Achtlos blieb mir sein Verlangen, seelenlos liess
 ich ihn sterben.
 Heute regt sich das Gewissen, da ich in der
 gleichen Lage,
 Heute, wo ich selbst muss missen gold'ner Zeiten
 Freiheitstage.
 Was der Vogel einst gefühlt hat gegen mich, der
 ich so schändlich
 Ihn gequält,—was ihn durchwühlt hat, heute ist
 es mir verständlich.
 Sang- und klanglos ziehen die Horen, schnecken-
 langsam, seelenquälend;
 Sang und Klang hat sich verloren in dem Vogel-
 bauerelend.

MEMORIES.¹⁵

Behind the palings, wire surrounded, glistening
 verdant in its swing,
 Sits a starling in the light of the sun, and loudly
 proclaims his song,
 "I am free!" Defiantly it peals from his
 throat.

¹⁵ Lager Echo, Knockaloe, No. 8, 15th September, 1917.

In the depths of my numb soul, a memory trembling awakens.

Once, long years ago, I lay in wait for a starling,
With artful cunning I caught him, and in a cage
I placed him:

On his perch he sat there brooding, dumb and motionless.

With coaxing I tried, then with anger, to make him burst forth into song.

But in vain. No success, in spite of persuasions.
He neither hopped nor sang, because that sweet freedom was missing.

For years I held him prisoner, heartless I witnessed his ruin;

Heedless I refused his desire, soulless I let him die.

To-day awakens my conscience, now I'm in the self-same state;

To-day, now that I too must miss those golden days of freedom.

What the bird felt once against me, who tortured him so cruelly,

What once raged through his breast, it all is clear to me now.

Wearily, sadly the days drag by; our souls are steeped in torture.

Voice and song have lost themselves in the misery of caged bars.

EFFECTS OF LACK OF PRIVACY.

We will now consider more closely the relations of the prisoners one to another. We have already seen how the people "get on each other's nerves," because of the unvarying intercourse and the impossibility of separating themselves and being alone. They try their

hardest, but naturally without success, to avoid each other. Perhaps also they see unconsciously in their fellow-prisoner, also on the defensive, a competitor and an enemy. They quarrel with each other and disputes arise from the merest trifles.

“ Il tourne à l'aigre, mon cafard. Il s'en faut de peu, ce soir, que je comprenne certaines scènes de casemate qui m'avaient étonné: des hommes silencieux, s'exaspérant soudain, et, pour un mot, se jetant les uns sur les autres, se battant comme chevaux sans avoine dans l'écurie. . . . Pauvres fauves en cages! ” So speaks Riou.

Discussions on simple matters result in wild wrangling and often end in blows.

“ What man can look round the hut and find one with whom he has not quarrelled, publicly or in his thoughts? And even if the dispute did not last long and the situation soon became bearable, yet in spite of every effort to suppress ill-feeling, the sting remained.”¹⁶

As real events practically never happen in the camps, gossip becomes all the more busy; the neighbours are all involved, and disputes and quarrels ensue. Many of the prisoners combine faultfinding with a passion for declaring themselves superior to their neighbours; they snobbishly boast of their social position and high connections, and make themselves out to be persons of importance.

¹⁶ Stobsiade, Fortnightly Journal of the German Prisoners' Camp, Stobs, Scotland, June 1st, 1916.

Engrossing themselves with the trumpery affairs of camp life, they become paltry and egotistical. Gradually they build up for themselves a little world, which becomes their all in all, in which they completely spend themselves. Finally they measure the events of the outside world by the standard of their own narrow horizon.

They are only too ready to attribute their imprisonment to everything base and vile. In casual actions of the Commandant and his subordinates they see premeditated and wicked machinations. They regard malice as the motive for every occurrence in their daily life. Deep distrust characterises their train of thought. They feel themselves exploited by all—the hostile government, the director of the camp, the caterer, the prisoners who attend to the post—all seek their own advantage at the expense of the camp; in Army slang, they “scrounge.”¹⁷ There are camps where the complaint over “scrounging” drowns every other. A humorous camp poet has described this weakness in an excellent caricature:—

•

¹⁷ The German term “Schiebung”—one of the commonest of camp words—has no exact equivalent in English. Its meaning appears to be intermediate between that of the two slang words, “wangle” and “scrounge.”—X.

SCHIEBUNG.¹⁸

(To the tune: "Püppchen, du bist mein
Augenstern.")

Man fragt an allen Tagen
Von morgens früh bis spät,
Wie dies sich zugetragen
Und warum das so geht.
Erklärt man dann die Sache
Und geht aus sich heraus,
Ertönt 'ne gift'ge Lache,
Und alle rufen aus:
Schiebung, verfluchte Schieberei,
Schiebung, so, Sie sind auch dabei,
Schiebung, verfluchte Schiebung,
Sie Schieber, Sie das glaubt' ich nie.
Schiebung, wohin das Auge späht,
Schiebung, wo man auch geht und steht,
Schiebung, verfluchte Schiebung,
Es wird geschoben hier und auf der ganzen
Welt.

Erhältst du ein Paar Schuhe
Aus dem Regierungsstore,
Da lässt dir keine Ruhe
Der böse Rachekorps.
Man sagt, du seist ein Lümmel,
Du hätt'st der Paare drei,
Man danke nur dem Himmel,
Dass selbst man nicht so sei.

Refrain: Schiebung, etc.

- Stehst du auf jenem Bogen,
Der die Paket enthält,
Da wirst du durchgezogen
Und alles beisst und bellt.
Und holst du dir die Sachen,
Ein Kistchen, das fast leer,
Da schrei'n die Hüttendrachen:
"Wo hat er das nur her!!?"

Refrain: Schiebung, etc.

¹⁸ Stobsiade, No. 8, 14 Jan., 1916.

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It may also be observed in this connection that in many camps the forms of speech in conversation sink to a very low level,¹⁹ both among the educated and uneducated. An Englishman who was nineteen months in Ruhleben writes as follows²⁰ :—

“Coarse and filthy vituperations first came from the lips of the lower stratum of our community, to which they were native, but they gradually and imperceptibly percolated through the higher strata, until even the university graduate would unblushingly utter them. Oaths and expletives that were bandied by navvies were ironically repeated by respectable business men, but repeated so often that they became an integral part of their normal vocabulary, and thus every man selected for release to England was advised by his friends to go into a sort of quarantine before venturing to emerge in the bosom of his family.”

SEXUAL DIFFICULTIES.

The phenomena of their sexual life are of vital importance.²¹ Two essential facts must be realised—the prisoners are deprived of normal

¹⁹ A reliable observer states that he did not notice excessive prevalence of bad language. It did not appear to him to be worse in camps than in the Army.—X.

²⁰ S. Cohen, *The Ruhleben Prison Camp*, London, 1916.

²¹ Another observer states: “That the sexual question was an urgent and terrible one in the lager is obvious . . . and there can remain no doubt

sexual intercourse, and they live solely in association with men.

In the first period they try with all their might to keep the recollection of their women-folk alive within them, and by this means obtain some relief. This is in reality an effort towards a substitute for normal sexual intercourse. The prisoners adorn their habitations with suggestive pictures, and sensual subjects take a prominent place in their conversation. Dances are greatly favoured when half of the party are attired in ladies' costumes.²² The following are accounts in verse and may give the reader a good idea of such festivities:—

L'INVITATION A LA VALSE.²³

C'est le soir—et c'est bien, Verlaine, l'heure exquise,

Puisque dans le néant un jour de plus s'en va—

Entre russes souvent un ballet s'improvise,

Où danse Nijinsky, sinon la Pavlova,

Ballet russe en plein air, exempt de toute pose;

Le danseur y dédaigne un artifice vain,

of the origin of a great deal of the so-called 'barbed-wire disease.' Against the consequences of unnatural sexual conditions . . . much can be done by preventing idleness and maintaining a living interest in life among the men."—X.

²² This is likely to have been an unusual occurrence. A reliable observer states that he never came across an instance, and that in most camps it would not have been easily possible.—X.

²³ Jean Trarieux, *Le Livre des jours monotones*. Paris, 1915.

Et s'il ne peut mimer le Spectre de la Rose,
Il mime au naturel le Spectre de la Faim. . . .
A la valse qui donc m'invite?
L'orchestre n'a qu'un instrument.
C'est, sur le fond de la marmite.
Une mélopée insolite
Qui fait tout l'accompagnement.
Le plaisant se mêle au tragique;
Les pieds sont lourds, les doigts rugueux;
Quelque chose de nostalgique
Se dégage de la musique
Qui rythme la danse des Gueux. . . .

KANTINENBALL.²⁴

Ball ist heute in der Kantine,
Johann spielt die Quetschmaschine,
Franz die dicke Trommel.
Wütend haut er auf die Becken,
Als wollt er die Toten wecken,
Und dazwischen schrill und froh
Jauchzt das Piccolo.

Stampfend drehen sich die Paare,
Dampfend rinnt der Schweiss vom Haare,
Staub steigt dick wie Nebel,
Und der Duft der Häringsjauche
Mischt sich mit dem Tabaksrauche.
Doch dazwischen schrill und froh
Jauchzt das Piccolo.

Weiberhüte, weisse Blusen,
Seid'ne Strümpfe, off'ne Busen:
Bursche in Verkleidung.
In der Röcke offenen Schlitzen
Sieht man Spitzenhöschen blitzen,
Leider Bursche nur,—oho!
Jauchzt das Piccolo.

²⁴ Stobsiade, No. 4, 24 Oct., 1915.

Wilder wird die Tanzerregung,
In dem Rhythmus der Bewegung
Schwankt die ganze Hütte.
Alles Leid, das uns durchrüttelt,
Ist im Tanze abgeschüttelt;
Und dazwischen schrill und froh
Jauchzt das Piccolo.

Theatrical performances also afford some compensation, if there are feminine rôles, which are always popular. The impersonators understand very well how to stir up the imagination. And when they descend from the stage their "character" name still sticks to them and each has "her" young man or lover.

Homosexual practices are probably not as frequent as might be imagined. Mutual self-abuse would be more likely to be indulged in. But as a rule the prisoners are averse from talking on this subject, and it is therefore difficult to form an opinion. After all, young healthy people are accustomed to have their circle of friends without serious transgressions occurring.

It is not uncommon for two friends to associate like lovers. They live in perfect unity, share their parcels, etc. It may be inferred that a homosexual element is here involved. In a few camps I was informed of homosexual epidemics; these appeared chiefly during the earlier part of the imprisonment; they hardly ever occurred during the third and fourth years. It seems as if the image of woman is gradually suppressed into the subconsciousness. After release from prison, contact with women

is for many a soul-stirring event. An officer who had been interned in Switzerland related to me how the first time he spoke to a woman (one of the Committee ladies) he was indescribably moved and became embarrassed and confused.

CAMP PSYCHOLOGY.

Before inquiring into the mental reaction of an individual prisoner under the various influences of camp life, we will consider the camp inmates as a whole. Every camp has, in a sense, a collective individuality, with its own peculiarities and dispositions. It can be easily imagined that a mental unity is established in a company of people who, without exception, are filled with the self-same hopes and sorrows. This, of course, prevails chiefly in civilian prison camps; in military camps, especially among officers, rank produces artificial barriers.

Presenting an extraordinary mixture of chance acquaintances, there exists in the civilian prison camp a uniformity among the prisoners, who, though widely divergent in their intellectual and social relationships, are yet united by *one* longing and *one* hope. The Russian psychologist, Von Bechterew,²⁵ writing of national assemblies, expresses this:—

“In contrast with ordinary society, this type of gathering, where only casual acquaintanceships prevail, develops an enormous unity, and feels

²⁵ W. v. Bechterew, *Die Bedeutung der Suggestion im sozialen Leben*. Tract 39 of the collection: *Grenzfragen des Nerven- u. Seelenlebens*.

and acts as one. What is it that welds these crowds of strangers together, what causes the simultaneous throbbing of every pulse, what inspires the *one* purpose, the *one* desire? It is just the mutual feeling and the fixity of ideas that binds these crowds into a powerful organism. . . . And once these masses have found each other and are bound by a common impulse, then suggestion and re-suggestion become the most striking factors in all future events."

The community of a camp consists of people who hope and expect together, whose souls keep pace in growing weary. Emotions in common and a changed and diseased mentality afford most favourable ground for the seed of mental infection.

In many camps the taste for gambling is developed through contagion, and the prisoners become slaves to the gaming tables. The last halfpenny, even the ration, is staked. The games are pursued with such intensity that the prison authorities are helpless in their efforts to cope with it.

We have already mentioned the epidemics of homosexual offences, as well as the complaints about "scrounging," which are nothing but outbreaks of loss of moral judgment. At the bottom of this is often an undecided, clumsy, or really unjust act on the part of the prison authorities. Discussion diffuses the matter, especially as the crowd in a camp is predisposed to such contingencies.²⁶ It is

²⁶ W. Hellpach. *Die geistigen Epidemien, Sammlung: Die Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt, 1907.

extraordinary how rumours travel through the camps, which, though not actually believed, remain uncontradicted, and how easily they are spread abroad without restraint. These rumours generally deal with the closure of the camp, but more frequently with an imminent exchange. In one civilian camp this rumour was so persistently asserted that many of the prisoners started to pack their trunks for fear of being late; others bade each other farewell, even in the middle of the night. This is an instance, not of talk in common only, but of emotion in common, at work.

We have noticed that the rage for something novel originates in the stale uneventfulness of camp life.

“ . . . la lassitude des soirs qui n'en finissent pas, l'ennui des longues marches sur nos 475 mètres (grand tour), la monotonie vide des gibernes sans matières et sans fin, surtout l'affreuse sensation d'impuissance, d'inutilité, d'infécondité, de stérilité, d'inactivité, d'incapacité.” ²⁷

The bad habit of excessive smoking is probably due to imitation.

The general tone of a camp affects all its occupants in common. It is chiefly regulated by the height of the expectations prevailing at the time, and rises and falls with this. If the prisoners read in the papers of negotiations for exchange, they are filled with an exuberance

²⁷ Prisoner's Pie, L'assiette sans beurre. Camp Journal, Crefeld, No. 1.

that gradually turns to a dull depression, permeating the very soul of the camp, if these negotiations are either frustrated or postponed. But the tone of the camp does not merely fluctuate; it alters fundamentally with the successive years of imprisonment.

The military prisoner, who loses his liberty in the stress of battle, finds in captivity a rest from his toil, and in the calm feels at first a true relief.

In the civilian camps a most enterprising spirit was at first predominant; clubs and schools were established, organisations formed. The prisoners were determined to make the best use of their time, and to prepare themselves for freedom. The *libido sexualis* was still very active, hence the passionate quest for some equivalent satisfaction.

But gradually the outside world seemed to disappear from their consciousness. There is something so unreal in camp life that the prisoners now seem incapable of dealing with concrete affairs. They live, so to speak, in a world of shadows. They drag out an existence pitched in lowered tones. An English prisoner characteristically describes Ruhleben Camp as "The City of Futility." All those who come in contact with these people realise what very little stress they lay on their own assertions, requisitions and complaints, and how easily they are diverted from them. There is a singularly hollow and empty note yielded by these camps with their thousands of men who

are either slaves to enforced idleness or who try to kill time by busying themselves feverishly with constant entertainments and lectures. Even the educated have the greatest difficulty in using their intellects, and find it infinitely hard to concentrate. Services become sparsely attended, and even the war news is followed with dwindling interest.

“Three years of this life have cramped us, three years of struggling and striving wasted. In this respect we all agree that everything that has been learnt or achieved behind the barbed wire bears the stamp of futility, and reveals its origin. The lack of freedom, the deadly loneliness, the life in public, the anxiety as to the future, and, above all, the uncertainty of duration of this existence, together explain the half-heartedness of our labour.”

This was written by a civilian prisoner in September, 1917.²⁸

As the *libido sexualis* gradually slackens, sexual excesses become year by year less frequent.²⁹ The image of woman seems to disappear from the memory. This is particularly noticeable in the camp journals. One has only to look through these annuals to see that in

²⁸ Lager Echo, Prisoners' Camp Journal, Knockaloe, Nr. 8, 15 September, 1917.

²⁹ The observer quoted in footnote 21 states: “. . . from my experience I should say that the apparent disappearance in the third and fourth year is more a matter due to the formation of permanent attachments and a subsequent loss of publicity.”—X.

the third and fourth years almost all erotic tendencies have disappeared.

ATTITUDE TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

Events in the outside world become for these people increasingly difficult to understand; their minds are filled with the affairs of their own small world. And so they live, not unlike sleep-walkers, in an atmosphere which has been well described in the following verse³⁰ :—

“ Tot ist ihr Denken, erkaltet das Herz, verflogen
die Seele;

Regellos fließt ihnen wässriges Blut
Durch das Geäder, stockend, jetzt jagend,
Pochend und klopfend, erlahmend, ersterbend.
In der dunklen, kalten Ecke der Hütte
Warten sie die Trümmer, warten, warten.”

“ Dead is their mind, cold is their heart, and
their soul has flown;

The thin blood flows irregularly
Through their veins, faltering, galloping,
Throbbing, tiring, dying.
In the dark, cold corner of their hut
They wait for ruin, they wait and wait.”

CAMP WEARINESS.

How can the soul of a prisoner withstand all these influences of camp life? The continual returning of the thoughts to the fact of imprisonment, the rankling against the barbed

³⁰ Lager Echo, Knockaloe, Nr. 10, 26 October, 1917.

wire, the endless hoping and waiting, the continual disappointments, all create an utter weariness.

The restless expectation is as important as the other factors in producing this lassitude. The Budapest neurologist, Jeno Kollarits,³¹ is right in his remark :—

“ I maintain that uncertainty and even happy expectations evoke feelings of disinclination and fear, especially among individuals disposed to depression.”

The consequences of the herded existence, sexual vagaries, and the meagre rations all help to undermine mental stability. And behind all this is a grey background fraught, especially for civilian prisoners, with anxiety for the future.

According to R. Bing,³² weariness alone is not sufficient to produce neurasthenia, but must be reinforced by emotion. It is just the emotional components that are prominent among prisoners as a result of hoping and waiting; of hatred of the power that cages them; of disillusionment of ambitious officers whose military career has been checked by

³¹ J. Kollarits, Über Widersprüche des Gefühlllebens bei nervösen u. nichtnervösen Menschen. Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie u. Psychiatrie, Vol. 33, Part 1/2.

³² R. Bing, Über den Begriff der Neurasthenie. Mediz. Klinik, Nr. 5, 1908.

capture; of the civilian prisoner's anxieties concerning the present and future fate of himself and his family.

This does not, however, prove that the mental disorders of war prisoners are to be traced to neurasthenia. A simplified conception of disease has given us a clue. Recent research teaches that neurasthenia and hysteria merge into one another, and the rigid distinctions between the various neuroses are now melting away.

DEGREES OF NERVOUS DISORDER.

The disease manifests itself in a series of symptoms, varying in degree with the individual. Foremost is an increased irritability, so that the patients cannot stand the slightest opposition and readily fly into a passion. A mania for discussion develops, but sound judgment is entirely lacking in the argument. In intercourse with others the patients are extraordinarily paltry, invariably seeking their own advantage. They find intense difficulty in concentrating on one particular object; their mode of life becomes unstable, and there is a restlessness in all their actions. They continually complain of the rapid onset of brain-fag. They will put a book down after reading only a few pages. It has even been noticed among the interned that during meal times they will several times get up from table and then sit down again. From some I have heard the com-

plaint that they cannot stand musical and theatrical performances for any length of time, restlessness forcing them to leave before the end. Others declare that they soon become physically exhausted, and on that account forego the short walks that are permitted.

Failure of memory is a general complaint, especially as regards names of people and of places connected with incidents occurring shortly before the outbreak of the war. One prisoner told me he had forgotten the name of his brother-in-law, another the name of the place where he lived. A sergeant-major, who for twenty months had been interned in Switzerland, after eighteen months' imprisonment, told me that while in the camp he had forgotten the name of his colonel who had commanded the regiment since 1913, and that up to date he could not recollect it.

Very often, people who are much affected brood for three or four days without uttering a single word. All in common have a dismal outlook and a pessimistic view of events around them. This depression is defined by the French as "cafard."³³ Many are inordinately suspicious. I have met with complaints of sleeplessness in some camps in considerable number, in others not at all. Occasionally the people state that their eyesight is becoming defective and that it is a strain to read by artificial light. Sexual impotence frequently manifests itself.

³³ Le cafard, by Albert Nicole, aumônier at the Zossen camp. Edition of "Furche."

When once these symptoms have developed they generally maintain a uniform level. But I have met people who declared that though restlessness had prevented them from touching a book for months, intellectual work had once more become possible.

Many prisoners told me that their sleep was disturbed by wild dreams. Very frequently also they talk or shout in their sleep. Military prisoners declared that this was common enough in barrack life, though not as frequent as in the prison camp. The substance of their talk was generally concerned with their trench experiences. I was told of one man who used to sit up in his sleep, curse the enemy for a few minutes, and then lie down again. In captivity many of these ideas appear to be suppressed into the subliminal region, but are disclosed in the dream state, which so often reveals the unknown.

NOMENCLATURE.

The prisoners have many appropriate terms for these nervous phenomena. For instance, the English classify them as "nerves"; the Germans call them "barbed wire fever" or the "grauen Vogel." To the Frenchman the word "cafard" implies the height of depression. The names barbed wire disease, "psychose du fil de fer," probably originated in Switzerland, but I have not succeeded in

tracing their source. These terms have been so generally adopted that they are now even employed in international discussions. For instance, an agreement made between Great Britain and Germany at the Hague in July, 1917, contains a paragraph about the disease, which reads: "Prisoners of war who have been at least eighteen months in captivity and who are suffering from 'barbed wire disease' shall for the future be recognised as suitable for internment in Switzerland." The name is significant and therefore deserves to be retained. But it must not be said that the constraint, the barbed wire, is the primary cause of the disease. As we have already tried to point out, the uncertainty as to the duration of imprisonment and the ever present and never changing company of others are just as important factors.

PREVALENCE.

Probably very few prisoners who have been over six months in the camp are quite free from the disease. Of course, there are many degrees, varying from the easily excited to the introspective, apathetic condition. I am chiefly dependent on the statements of prisoners as to the proportion of the severer cases; one man told me that on an average in every hut of thirty people there were three regarded by the rest as seriously affected. Another informed me that he had known definitely of fifty in a

camp of several hundred men, and of these fifty, ten gave evidence of serious nervous depression.³⁴

It is only a question of time before the disease develops, as is shown by the two following examples:—

A Fusilier, who had volunteered for military service, by profession a schoolmaster, of genial disposition and a sportsman, was taken prisoner in April, 1915, and devoted himself to active physical exercise, especially football. In October, 1915, he began to become irritable, and often said to a friend, "When I go out and see that barbed wire, I feel just like tearing the whole barricade and the sentry to bits." He became seriously depressed and often completely indifferent. According to his friend, he maintained sexual continence completely.

The other case concerns a sergeant-major, by profession a soldier, who was taken prisoner in August, 1914. At the end of twelve months his condition began to change. Up till then he had been quite cheerful. It appeared to his friends that he started by giving vent to violent tirades against the enemy. He developed irritation at his surroundings, and finally became and remained gravely depressed.

³⁴ A reliable observer states: "The description of barbed-wire disease is, I think, very good and accurate. In *mild* forms the proportion of men suffering, *in a workless camp*, would be a good deal higher than is indicated—especially if the camp had been long in existence."—X.

A little more must be said as to the occurrence of the disease. We meet it in military and civilian camps, both amongst officers and men; on the whole, reservists suffer more than regulars. It seems most strongly marked among those unprepared for camp life, individuals with self-reliant independent characters, such as are so often met with among civilian prisoners.³⁵ These are often people who have emigrated in order to strike out a new career and develop unrestricted their own individuality. To such people restraint comes very much harder than to officers and men who by their barrack life are prepared to some extent for a cramped and herded existence. Here the levelling influence of the uniform with its exclusion of individuality stands its bearer in good stead. Gaston Riou, whom we have already mentioned, served in the war as reservist and as stretcher-bearer. The communal life was so foreign to him that he wrote :

“ Prenez des gens, sans rien de commun que le drapeau. Leurs traditions, leurs éducations, leurs tempéraments diffèrent; leurs habitudes sont prises . . . jetez ces soldats, pêle-mêle, dans une cave. Soumettez-les à une règle tatillonne. Obligez-les à vivre coude à coude, des jours, des nuits, dans la misère, loin de tout ce qui faisait leur vie. Ils auront de bonnes heures, certes! Quelquefois, pleins de leurs amours et

³⁵ Another observer states: “ I do not think that sufficient emphasis is laid on the worse effects of internment on civilians than on military prisoners.”
—X.

de la patrie absente, leurs paroles et leurs silences sont purs et doux comme un lent crépuscule d'été. . . . Mais après ! Non, je veux oublier."

The most favourable conditions are certainly those of the labour camps, where the men are not so thickly aggregated and are engaged in agriculture. I attribute their well-being chiefly to the fact that they are engaged in productive work.³⁶ The impression of uselessness tinges the various occupations forced upon prisoners in camps.

"It occurred to me that if one wished to stifle and degrade a man completely and to punish him so terribly, that even the vilest murderer would tremble and shrink before the prospect, it would be necessary only to give him work of absolute futility and aimlessness."³⁷

OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DISEASE.

The question has already been asked whether many of the mental disorders among prisoners may not be due more to the experiences in the trenches than to the effects of camp life. This certainly may be a factor among military prisoners, but the frequent occurrence of the

³⁶ The following extract from a report on internment camps bears on this point: "A fair proportion of the men remain cheerful and fairly normal; these are the men, generally speaking, who have definite and constant employment of some sort."—X.

³⁷ Dostojewsky, *Memoiren aus einem Totenhaus*.

disease among civilian prisoners who have never fought in the war proves that it is not the only cause.

The treatment of prisoners has but little influence on their mental condition. *Cruel, brutal treatment does not produce the disease, neither does good treatment prevent it.* This fact was confirmed by war prisoners interned in Switzerland. I have myself found many very severe cases among men in camps governed by capable and considerate commandants, whose administration could only be described as thoroughly satisfactory. Unfortunately, kind and just treatment cannot stave off the disease; I say unfortunately, because I made the acquaintance of many commandants who were splendid men, bringing much intelligence to bear on the psychology of the prisoner; yet in spite of everything they could not stem the tide of these devastating nervous disorders.

Even a beautifully situated camp is no preventive. I recollect a most charming one, situated among trees and looking on to hilly country; yet just here I met with several very bad cases.

The attempt has already been made to base certain types of psychoneurosis on social and historical conditions.³⁸ The American physician, Beard, who introduced to medicine the

³⁸ W. Hellpach, *Nerveneleben u. Weltanschauung*. Wiesbaden, 1906.

conception of neurasthenia, described the neurasthenic symptom complex as the disease of the American businessman; he emphasised the fact that neurasthenia could develop only in the soil afforded by American commercialism. W. Hellpach goes further and seeks to attribute not only certain types of psychoneurosis, such as the hysteria of those receiving pensions during invalidity, but also the mental attitude of certain classes of the community, to well-defined psychical influences arising from special conditions of life. He attributes the Marxian philosophy of the proletariat to the joylessness of their working system and the aimlessness of their existence. In no class of life are the conditions so monotonous as in that of the proletariat. For that reason the spiritual life is always the same and the psychical atmosphere remains unchanged. This phenomenon, which affects the proletariat so generally and which among them is not easy to recognise, takes a transparent form among prisoners of war. For they are all subjected to the same conditions of life, giving rise to the same factors transforming their mental existence. Thus the mentality of the prisoner is based on social and historical conditions, and its pathological expression is the barbed wire disease.

PROSPECTS OF RECOVERY.

What are the prisoner's chances of recovery? In his treatise on prison psychosis, Bleuer remarks: "In life-long imprisonment the most

important factor is lacking towards the cure of specific diseases." This fundamental condition as regards both isolated and promiscuous captivity is, of course, release and return to the normal conditions of life. The majority of prisoners must wait till the end of the war for their release from the barbed wire enclosure. Fortunately, internment in neutral countries gives a few the opportunity of shortening their imprisonment. But the disease is not cured by the mere release from imprisonment. If it has developed to any extent, recovery must entail a long period. In Switzerland we have had considerable opportunity of noticing this.

Many of the interned often give one the impression of being "broken up"; their own people find them changed in disposition, and those who through service or business come into contact with them frequently find them very hard to get on with. Symptoms which appeared in imprisonment are also displayed during internment in a neutral country, though possibly in a slighter degree.

An old general, who recently visited his fellow-countrymen interned in Switzerland, expressed his opinion as follows: "During my forty years of service I had the opportunity of learning to know my officers and men, and I believe I understood them. Now I have visited my interned comrades, but I confess I cannot understand them." The majority of these people had been over a year in Switzerland.

Many of the interned with whom I have come into contact have told me they still suffer severely, and there are certainly many who will bear traces of the disease to the end of their days. Still, they were able to lay the foundations of recovery in Switzerland; for the sooner the harmful influences are curtailed, the better are the prospects of recovery.

WIDER ASPECTS OF THE DISEASE.

So far we have seen how a man suffers when he is imprisoned for years with numerous others; and we have experienced how, as a result of the heavy strain, his spirit is broken, not only during the period of imprisonment, but for long afterwards.

At the beginning of this study it was stated that an attempt would be made to ascertain the extent to which fresh ground was being broken in the description of the mental aberrations among prisoners of war. Ever since the earth has been peopled by man wars have been waged, and in every war prisoners have been taken. But reports over mental disease among prisoners in earlier times are very meagre.

One interesting memorandum deals with the imprisonment of Napoleon I. at St. Helena. The Emperor was not alone, but lived in banishment on the island with a small company of faithful followers. In a medical diary which

his physician, Dr. Barry E. O'Meara,³⁹ has handed down to posterity, certain mental disorders are mentioned, such as "irritation nerveuse considérable" and "mélancolie noire." It sums up his condition thus:—

"Cet état d'inactivité et de réclusion, joint aux effets du climat et au manque de société et de distractions, devait nécessairement occasionner des maladies à un homme dont les facultés morales et physiques avaient, depuis sa grande jeunesse, été employées de la manière la plus active."

The African explorer, Stanley, who took part in the American Civil War, was a prisoner for four months in a camp near Chicago. His memoirs⁴⁰ give his impressions of that time:—

"Left to ourselves, with absolutely nothing to occupy us, except to brood, curse our lot, pass to each other the germs of infectious diseases, and wander apathetically round our cages, we soon arrived with healthy bodies at a state of putrefaction."

Here, too, we read of the same complaints uttered by the prisoners of the present world war. But imprisonment for Stanley only lasted a few months, and his psycho-neurosis could not develop in so short a time.

³⁹ See *Recueil de pièces authentiques sur le captif de St. Hélène*. Paris, 1822.

⁴⁰ Henry Morton Stanley, "My Life," 1911.

OTHER SIMILARLY CIRCUMSTANCED GROUPS: 1.—CONVICTS.

In certain convict stations maintained by France and Russia we find a special kind of herded existence, though not a war prison. The French Government has some of these convict camps in Cayenne. A "Bagno"⁴¹ has several hundred inmates, who remain there for a limited time or for the rest of their life. It deals chiefly with dangerous criminals, each of whom must be eminently suitable for an interesting study in criminal psychology.

It is stated that furious fights among the prisoners are not infrequent in the "Bagno," arising often from the most trivial provocations, such as a quarrel over tobacco or some such trifle, and ending in bloodshed or homicide. One has only to look at the photographs of these convicts to be convinced of their abnormal and pathological character.

Still better known than the French colonies are the vast prisons in Siberia. These are of greater interest, for apart from ordinary criminals, there are also those who have been sentenced for political offences. To Dostojewski⁴² we owe a powerful description of life in a convict station, a so-called "ostrog," and of the mental life of the prisoners. The short

⁴¹ *Le Bagne, châtiment et crime. Lectures pour Tous.* 1910.

⁴² F. W. Dostojewsky, *Memoiren aus einem Totenhaus.*

general sketch reminds one forcibly of the war prisoners' camps :—

“ On the other side of these gates lay the glorious free world where men lived. But on this side of the fencing there were only phantoms of that world, such as one weaves for oneself in a fairy-tale. Here was a world different in every aspect: special laws, special customs, special costume, special practices—a living vault, a life different from any other. Here there were people of an exceptional type. I will now try to describe this secluded corner.”

Those who have learnt to know the life of the prisoner of war can well appreciate Dostojewski's descriptions. Although the “ostrog” inhabitants cannot be compared with the prisoners of war, yet these “Memoirs of a Mortuary” put us on the right path towards the solution of our problem.

Besides the above we may look for other groups of men whose conditions may be compared with the herded existence of prisoners of war; groups, therefore, who live together in close contact and are more or less cut off from the outside world. They should show us how the soul of an individual will react under such special conditions of existence.

2.—SOLDIERS.

At the very front comes the life of the soldier, because it represents the most widespread compulsory existence in crowds.

Psychical epidemics have been observed

among troops in times of war and of peace. Two examples shall be quoted from the past and from the present.

Among the Swiss regiments in French service there frequently arose epidemics of homesickness, following upon a "massed suggestion."⁴³ produced by songs in their native jodelling, or by folk songs, or by the sound of the Alpine horn. These conjured forth reminiscences so intense that the mental balance of many of the soldiers became deranged, and they deserted in large numbers, or fell sick, or attempted suicide. Such experiences caused the French military authorities to issue an order forbidding the band to play the "cowherd melody."

A highly interesting modern psychological phenomenon occurring during the first year of the war is presented by the so-called "Angels of Mons." It concerns optical hallucinations which appeared to many soldiers of English divisions who were slowly retreating from Mons by Le Cateau towards the Ypres line, whilst fighting heroically against tenfold numerical superiority. They were picked men, capable of withstanding tremendous mental and physical strain. Many believed at the time that they saw St. George and hosts of angels covering their retreat.

In a letter to the "London Evening

⁴³ Stoll, *Suggestion u. Hypnotismus in der Völkerpsychologie*. Leipzig, 1904.

News'' a Lieut.-Colonel describes his experiences as follows :—

The Evening News, Sept. 14th, 1915.

“ August 26th, 1914, was the day of the battle at Le Cateau. At dawn we came into the battle and fought till evening. We were incessantly under the overwhelming fire of German artillery, and our division suffered heavy losses. But we accomplished our retreat in good order, and marched all night long on August 26th and August 27th, with only two hours' halt. The brigade to which I belonged formed the rear-guard of the division, and during August 27th we were continually forced to take up positions to cover the retreat of other divisions. It was hard work, and on the evening of the 27th we were completely overcome with physical and mental fatigue. No doubt we were hard put to it, but the retreat was accomplished in perfect order, and I am convinced that our brains were working normally and steadily. On the night of the 27th I rode in the column with two other officers. We talked and took great pains to keep ourselves awake on our horses. As we rode along I noticed on either side of our line of retreat large detachments of riders. They appeared to me several squadrons strong and to be moving through the fields, keeping pace with us. The night was very dark, but I thought I saw squadron after squadron quite clearly. At first I said nothing, but I watched the riders for twenty minutes. Both of the other officers had ceased speaking. At last one of them asked me if I could see anything in the fields. I related what I had seen. The third officer then admitted that he had been watching the riders for twenty minutes. We were so convinced that we had seen real cavalry that at the next halt an officer rode off in the direction to investigate. But he found no one.

Then the night became darker, and we could see no more. This phenomenon was observed by many of our column. We were certainly tired and spent, but it seems to me extraordinary that so many people witnessed the same thing. For myself, I am firmly convinced I saw the riders; I am sure they did not only exist in my imagination. I do not try to solve the riddle; I only relate the bare facts."

The way in which the story of "The Angels of Mons" spread over England was remarkable. A whole sheaf of literature resulted⁴⁴; the above newspaper article is only one of dozens. From a psychological standpoint it would be most interesting to penetrate further. But we should then be faced with a problem dealing with the origin of war time rumours, a question that does not come within the scope of our observations.

We will return to military service and life in barracks. It occasionally happens that men in the service apparently alter in character. Others, especially after fatigue, are peculiarly irritable towards their comrades. Towards their superiors they give vent to fits of rage which may degenerate into so-called "military frenzy" (*Militärkoller*). The famous story of Captain v. Köpenick is nothing but the general adverse judgment of a whole division. The people were in a state of lethargy. From this point of view we must watch the development

⁴⁴ The Angels of Mons, by Arthur Machen. London, 1915. On the Side of the Angels, by Harold Begbie. London, 1915.

of military mentality, the manifestation of which is connected with the word "militarismus."

To the same category belong "Tropical frenzy" (*Tropenkoller*), a condition of excitability to which the European in the tropics is prone if for a long time he is deprived of white men's society. A classic example of this was the French military mission to the Sudan, conducted by the officers Voulet and Chamoiné. An extraordinary collective mentality develops in military colonies cut off from the rest of the world; French explorers have given it the name "mentalité grégaire."

3.—SHIPS' CREWS.

On further search for groups of men who find themselves in a position similar to that of promiscuous captivity we find ships' crews, especially those of sailing ships making long voyages. Here also we have to deal with groups of men enduring isolation.

Descriptions from earlier times depict "massed" illusions and hallucinations among the passengers on sailing ships long becalmed in extreme heat on the open sea. Bechterew⁴⁵ reports an interesting case that happened in 1846:—

"The frigate 'Belle Poule' and the sloop 'Berceau,' two French vessels, were surprised

⁴⁵ V. Bechterew, Die Bedeutung der Suggestion im sozialen Leben. 1. c.

by a tremendous hurricane in the neighbourhood of a group of islands. The 'Belle Poule' emerged from the storm, safe and sound, but lost sight of the 'Berceau'; and as it seemed futile to seek the vanished ship on the open sea, she made her way by Madagascar to a prearranged rendezvous, the Island of Ste. Marie. But the sloop had not turned up, neither was she to be seen anywhere in the neighbourhood of the island. A painful time of waiting began for the crew of the 'Belle Poule.' With each day anxiety increased on behalf of the unfortunate vessel and her crew of 300. So passed a month of suspense. At last, one hot afternoon, a watchman from his crow's-nest sighted a vessel without masts in the west and near the shore. The point was scrutinised, and the statement of the watchman corroborated. As may be imagined, the general excitement was intense, and the more so, as all were convinced by the evidence of their own eyes that it was not a wreck, but a raft full of men, being towed by sloops and giving signals of distress. The vision lasted several hours, the details of the terrible phantom becoming every moment more distinct. At the command of the captain, the 'Archimède,' a cruiser anchoring in the roads, hurried to the assistance of the shipwreck. The day was already drawing to a close, and the southern night beginning to fall as the 'Archimède' approached her destination. All this time the crew of the despatched ship were keeping their eyes fixed on the people on the raft, their cries for help being heard above the splashing of the oars. And this remarkable spectre did not disappear until the 'Archimède' had lowered her boats and struck against something mistaken for a raft overflowing with men, but found to be a clump of trees carried away by the tide. Only then was hope of saving the 'Berceau' and her crew abandoned. Nothing was ever heard of her fate."

Through their terrible experiences the crews of the "Belle Poule" and the "Archimède" were in a state of extreme nervous excitement. Waiting, and the anxiety on behalf of their comrades, had fagged their brains. The ground was thereby prepared for mental suggestion and delusions.

It is well known that quarrels arise among the crews of sailing ships which do not put into port for months on end, being solely dependent on the incalculable factor, the wind; the men are in a state of irritability. For instance, Ross,⁴⁶ the Polar explorer, says: "Disputes frequently occur between the captain and sailors of whaling boats and other vessels trading in these remote regions." These long periods at close quarters produce the same effect on the mentality as does imprisonment. People who have made long sea voyages can easily realise this. Towards the end of a voyage one often becomes so disgusted with one's deck acquaintances that one would readily pitch them overboard. Disputes and quarrels on passenger steamers are of no uncommon occurrence.

The various psychical influences are thus not without effect on sailors who are exposed to them for a long time. A French naval surgeon⁴⁷ writes :—

⁴⁶ A Voyage in the Southern and Antarctic Regions, by Sir James Ross. London, 1847.

⁴⁷ Hesnard, La Neuropsychiatrie dans la marine. Archives de médecine navale, 1910.

“La neurasthénie est fréquente dans nos services maritimes et on peut en raconter de très diverses variétés. . . . Cette neurasthénie, dont nous avons observé plusieurs cas très nets, surtout dans les milieux embarqués ou les milieux dans lesquels les rapports avec l'entourage sont les plus étroits (écoles), se traduit par une série de symptômes: irritabilité, tendances aux idées théoriques de suicide et de persécution, anxiétés, obsessions variables ayant généralement au service besoin de solitude et d'isolement.”

4.—INSTITUTIONS.

The same psychical influences that we meet in ships are also at work in sanatoria, hospitals and similar institutions with segregated inmates. Dissensions, intrigues, and many other vexations affect those who spend their lives in these institutions.

5.—MONASTERIES.

In monasteries the same phenomena are not uncommon.⁴⁸ Constant sociability is enjoined by the rules of the Trappists, in contrast with most other orders, where the monks live in solitude. The mental sufferings endured by these monks through continual contact with each other, was recently described by a Trappist⁴⁹ :—

⁴⁸ H. Siemer, *Meine fünf Klosterjahre*. Hamburg, 1913.

⁴⁹ G. Mossier, soldat et trappiste. *Etude d'âme par un père de l'ordre des Trappistes*. Paris, 1917.

“ En surplus des jeûnes, de l'abstinence, des veilles, du travail, n'aurez-vous pas à supporter à tous les instants la croix de la vie commune, mortification que saint Bernard qui se connaissait en pénitences qualifie de maxima. Non, point de chambre particulière, point de petit chez-soi où l'on puisse agir un peu à sa guise et oublier un temps que cette chose chère entre toutes au cœur humain, la liberté, ne vous appartient plus. Et si vous trouvez en vos compagnons des âmes charitables, empressées même d'ordinaire à s'alléger l'une l'autre du fardeau commun, les oppositions dans les jugements, le désaccord dans les goûts, vous resteront une occasion de fréquents froissements, de contrariétés quelquefois vives. N'a-t-on pas dit fort à propos : Faites vivre ensemble des saints à canoniser, ils auront à souffrir. Et les saints à mettre sur les autels sont rares partout, même à la Trappe. Alors? . . . ”

6.—EXPLORERS.

Passing from the sailing ships we come to the Polar exploring expeditions. Most of the principal facts here also coincide with those of war imprisonment. It is particularly important to note that here, just as in the prison camps, a certain number of unsociable temperaments are herded together. It can be readily accepted that members of Polar expeditions are physically and mentally picked men who can be compared fairly with the best representatives of war prison camps. This comparison is much more natural than one with convicts. The pathological elements, which would defeat any such comparison, are absent in Polar explorers.

A Polar expedition is a poignant psychical experience, even for strong healthy natures. We can see this, when a weather-beaten man like Nansen writes in his diary a penetrating description of his mental state. For here we are dealing, not with a sentimental poet whose spirits oscillate with every change of the barometer, and who imparts these fluctuations to mankind in poetic form, but with a man whose iron will had already been put to the test on many memorable voyages of discovery before his great Polar expedition. The following is from his diary⁵⁰ :—

“ . . . Wherever I gaze I see how the threads of life entangle themselves into a confused web, extending ceaselessly from the sweet dews of dawn to the deadly stillness of everlasting ice. One thought follows another. ‘ You pluck the whole and it is so small ’; but one thought is prominent. ‘ Why did you undertake this voyage? ’ ”

Somewhat later :—

“ To-day the ice is still. Is the yearning desire benumbed, or is it wearing away or transforming itself into stupidity? Oh! how glorious were those days and nights of burning desire! But now the fire has changed to ice. Is it the restlessness of spring coming over me? The desire for activity, for something to dispel the enervating life? Perhaps my brain is over-weary. Night and day my thoughts are fixed on one point, the possibility of reaching the Pole and returning home. . . . Perhaps it is peace that I need, to sleep and sleep. . . . Perhaps a secret

⁵⁰ Fr. Nansen, “ In Nacht u. Eis.” Leipzig, 1897.

doubt as to the practicability of my plan? . . . My spirit is confused. . . . I am worn out, and yet not particularly tired. . . . I can see the pictures of my home, but they bore me strangely. . . . I have never thought like this before. I have no inclination to read, nor to draw, nor to do anything. The only thing that helps me is to write, and try to express myself in these pages, and to introspect. Yes, life is nothing but a succession of moods, half memories, half hopes.

"February 18th. Still a northerly wind. It is dreadfully dull, but the weather is clear and fine. This is all very well. We sledge and toboggan, read for our edification and amusement, write, make our observations, play cards, smoke, play chess, eat and drink; but, in spite of everything, after a time it becomes an accursed life—at least so it sometimes seems to me. . . . Sometimes this inactivity seems to drench one's spirit! Cannot something happen? Cannot we have a hurricane to tear up this ice and set it in surging motion like the open sea? Let us endure danger, let us fight for our lives—but only let us get forward. . . . It needs a tenfold strength of mind to sit still and trust in one's own theories, while Nature prevails, without being able to attain one atom of our purpose, except to reckon on one's own strength—that's nothing when one has a strong pair of arms.

"June 11th. The feeling of longing and emptiness, to which we dare pay no attention, drags on. But sometimes we cannot free ourselves from it, and our hands fall weak and powerless, so tired, so deadly tired.

"I spend my whole day at the microscope. Yes, it is an interesting occupation, but I have no longer the same keen interest for it as before.

"October 4th. Time is a good taskmaster—that yearning desire is not gnawing at me so intensely as before. Is apathy beginning? At

the end of the years shall I feel nothing at all? Ah! but sometimes it returns with all its old vigour, as if it would tear me in pieces. Nevertheless, I could never reconcile myself quite apart from this life. It means that one is never satisfied over anything, waiting for what may happen, waiting, perhaps, while the best years of one's power slip by.

"November 13th. I caught myself sitting for hours staring into the fire, dreaming into space. A nice way of making use of one's time! But at least it helps to pass the hours till the dreams are blown away by an icy gust of reality, and I sit in the midst of the desert and nervously start afresh to work.

"Oh! these all-exhausting thoughts that one can't release; they do indeed become tedious company."

Nansen also mentions that many members of the expedition suffered from sleeplessness.

The short remark at the commencement of the journey on ski with Johansen towards the Pole, "At last the brain can rest and the arms and legs do the work," shows the deep impression that hoping and waiting and the hostile environment of Polar ice may have on the explorer's mind, or rather the utter exhaustion of spirit produced by constant occupation with these same thoughts.

The Austrian explorer, Julius Payer⁵¹, similarly reports:—

"First Winter night. The long polar night makes a profound impression on the mind. The

⁵¹ Die österreichisch-ungarische Nordpolexpedition, by Julius Payer. Wien, 1877.

circle of light from a lamp is our whole world. . . . Incessant work is the only defence. No other conditions of existence, except the life of a prisoner, calls forth this necessity in the same way, or offers such opportunity for knowledge of self. The moral effect was increased for us by the realisation that we were surrounded by the unknown. Hope and a fixed purpose carry one over all sorts of troubles. But a voluntary exile from the world goes hard with one if the sacrifice prove futile—an inexorable 'No!' destroys all confidence, and our lot remains but a daily fight for self-preservation.

But even mental activity and the desire for action stand in sad contrast with the inconsolable monotony enforced upon us by long years of waiting, first for thaw and then for frost. . . . The longing for variety must even befall angels; and how strongly must this longing affect men, deprived of everything giving charm to their desires and enhanced in attractiveness by the imagination. The saying of Lessing is so true: 'We are too much accustomed to the society of the other sex not to feel the terrible void when deprived of its charms.' Such a life of total inertia must even deteriorate those idle fellows who pass their days in sleep. In fact, nothing could be more fatal for a winter Polar expedition than such an outbreak of mental and physical infirmity. . . . In the first winter the darkness troubled us less than our fluctuating prospects.

Second Winter. We were only occasionally sensitive to the solitude of our life because we shared it together, and contemplated the rest of mankind retrospectively; we ourselves lived in the constant presence of each other, and one knows it is more endurable to live always alone than never alone.

New Year's Eve, Second Winter. There was nobody who, so to speak, gave his mind to

the job, for we had been absent from home far too long, and, though our bodies were there, our spirits had flown.

Entire surrender of his individuality is an essential sacrifice that the Polar explorer must make to achieve his end. The job which has been apportioned to him admits of no party standpoint, still less of varying opinions as to taste and comfort. All irregularities of spirit, mind, or body must be subdued to a level of stoic apathy. He must become meek, keep his countenance at the daily reiteration of the dinner-table topics, the oft-described adventures, which never die, in spite of their staleness. His thoughts must be free from the dross of earthly desires; his self-consciousness must be buried under a mountain of respect towards the interests of peace. . . . Our own imagination was also crippled; even the most exciting story possessed nothing for us but the gravity and melancholy of a legend."

One of the members seemed greatly affected by his experiences, for Payer writes:—"Klotz, who has been depressed for some time . . ."

The Englishman Ross has also much to say about his mental experiences⁵²:—

"We were much refreshed (at meeting Esquimaux) after continual self-occupation and the unvarying society. . . . We had had our fill of anxiety and worry, of the sadness of frustrated hopes, and, above all, of the longing for our distant friends and home. What voyager can possibly be free from such moods? But there

⁵² Narrative of a Second Voyage in search of a North-West Passage, by Sir John Ross. Paris, 1835.

was something still harder to bear, and that never ceased. We were so terribly weary and dejected for lack of work, lack of variety, lack of mental occupation, lack of thought, and—why should I not say it?—lack of society. The everlasting monotony bore heavily on our spirits, and our minds grew weary for lack of incentive. The small events which occasionally happened were only a repetition of what we had so often experienced. Being imprisoned in one spot for so long, there was nothing more to interest us.

The very sight of the ice was to us an annoyance, a torture, a martyrdom, something vile, something to reduce us to desperation . . . we hated the sight of it because we hated the consequences; and everything that concerned it, every thought connected with it, was an abomination.

We hoped and feared; we were nearly driven to despair, till we were able to foresee release and success.

I don't know what we should have done or what would have happened to us had we not submitted to some kind of work, or had we stopped seeking for it. But this thankless task was not without value. The result was we did achieve something, and the useless achievements helped to keep up our hopes and spirits. It interrupted the monotony and the idle existence that caused us to brood and ponder over the future. An Italian proverb is true in its saying 'An idle man is a pillow for the devil.'"

Erich v. Drygalski,⁵² the German, writes:—

"Difficulties were sometimes made through disputes. . . . During the winter this moodiness has increased."

⁵² Zum Kontinent des eisigen Südens, by E. v. Drygalski. Berlin, 1904.

Later he writes :—

“ Much dissatisfaction and discontent arose.”

Drygalski warns Polar explorers impressively against books on philosophy; their readers would become impossible for themselves and those around.

We have to thank Friis, the Dane, chronicler of the Mylius Erichsen⁵⁴ expedition, for the most penetrating descriptions. Friis, by profession a painter, is a wonderful observer, as can be felt in his account :—

“ I was chiefly determined to describe life in the Polar regions as it affects the educated man who has been removed from his natural sphere and forced into surroundings both strange and hostile to him. . . .

Time passes away monotonously and sadly. Relieving guard is all that interrupts our existence in these days. At night two men watch together. We sit and doze in the mess, read a little, play cards, and take our rounds to and fro in the ship. We keep the fire watch open; if there is a snowstorm two of us go together on to the ice, and, in order to keep warm, take turns in using the pickaxe and holding the lantern. In the morning we light a fire in the caboose and make the porridge before creeping into our berths. These nights are long when one keeps watch, and so is the day when one tries in vain to sleep, close to the mess where the men are incessantly chattering. Work itself is not lacking, only the incentive. When, the entire day, one has only

⁵⁴ Im Grönlandeis mit Mylius Erichsen, by Achton Friis. Leipzig, 1910. Die Danmarkexpedition.

the choice of two things, work or idleness, it results, after a time, that no one finds peace in either. An eternal physical restlessness makes one irritable and unsociable.

The reversion of man to the long-tailed monkey can be made in far quicker time than might be thought possible. If one is systematically cut off from the outside world and has a definite piece of work, using up a large amount of energy and brute force, the happy result depends so much on the physical development that one must approach the matter from a purely animal standpoint. (Six months after setting out from Denmark.)

We became fat and lazy, and too weary and bored to look at each other. My neighbour is as repugnant to me as I to him.

No one can possibly imagine the irritating effect of being able to predict every morning at breakfast exactly how each one was going to make his appearance. . . . Thus, even in the morning one is like an accumulator, ready to discharge for want of giving way to one's feelings. . . . So the fact always remained, one found one's neighbour either wonderfully attractive or utterly repugnant. . . .

Second Winter. With the best of intentions we cannot spur on our minds or our imagination to anything whatever. Not for a second can we dedicate to sacrifice any of this unbearable distress. One moment I feel like knocking my neighbour down, and the next like stroking his head, while sobs are tearing my throat. Oh! how we miss the women! So many good sentiments are drowned without finding utterance. . . . Longing is here a gnawing trouble, a bleeding, painful wound."

With that we will conclude the reports of the Polar explorers. The reader may find on the

whole that we have gone far afield for examples of psychological manifestations. As already stated at the beginning, we set ourselves the task of examining to what degree we were treading on fresh ground, in our description of barbed wire disease. It was our object to place our representation of the disease on as broad a basis as possible. In the study of psychopathological phenomenon we must use comparison as our method of carrying out the experimentation which is the basis of scientific research. It would appear that the search for circumstances and conditions which affect the spirit in a similar way is particularly valuable in the elucidation of a psychical malady produced by psychical influences and dependent in extent and in progress on the nature of these influences.

COMPARISON OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS.

We have learnt to recognise as the fundamental facts of war imprisonment : *A multitude, closely confined, for an indefinite period.* The mind is greatly influenced by these external circumstances, by the herded existence and its consequences, the monotonous, unvarying society and the lack of solitude. Uncertainty arises from the indefinite period of duration, and the endless hoping and waiting; and finally, compulsion demands the restriction of all the usual habits.

Perhaps the power of different influences varies individually. For one it may be the

coercion, for another the uncertainty, and for a third, the herded existence that causes the mischief. But all three co-operate in producing the peculiar psycho-neurotic symptom complex of the prisoner of war.

It is true that in selecting kindred groups for comparison we have not had many examples combining all three conditions. The life of the soldier provides the compulsory herded existence. But the uncertain prospects for the future are lacking. Also compulsion is regarded more or less as a habit. With regard to life in sailing ships there is isolation, coupled with a certain degree of compulsion; but hope here finds its outlet. Next to the prisoner of war comes the Polar explorer. The descriptions of his state of mind are very similar; many of them one might roundly depict as "Cafard." Every Polar explorer complains of ennui, the result of ceaseless hoping. Irritability is also not lacking, owing to the unchanging society.

✓ The soul, in fact, desires a medium between solitude and close contact; as soon as this adjusted intercourse is encroached upon, troubles arise. In spite of these parallels, I do not believe that Polar explorers have become neurasthenic. For instance, Nansen's irritability did not extend beyond his presence on the "Fram"; and according to his own evidence, during his ski expedition he was never inclined to quarrel with his companion, Johansen. There are several elements to counteract the effect of ennui and thereby restore the men-

tal equilibrium. The captivity of the Polar explorer is self-inflicted; therefore the emotional components of hatred against enemy authority do not arise. Thoughts of return awake anticipations of honour and glory. Also the monotonous part of a Polar voyage does not last so very long, and it is broken by voyages and cross-country excursions. Not only are these counterbalancing elements entirely lacking for prisoners of war, but on the other hand injurious influences are hammering at his soul incessantly and with intense power. They continue to increase to the highest pitch, till his spirit falls a victim to psycho-neurosis.

INTERNATIONAL EFFECTS.

Barbed wire disease is evil, not only on account of its consequences to individuals, but principally on account of the enormous number of those stricken with it throughout Europe. In the case of hundreds of thousands the disease cripples vital energy and banishes happiness. Only too many will never be happy again, even to the end of their days. The thought of this suffering teaches us indeed to understand and value the wisdom of interning prisoners in a neutral country. This arrangement makes it possible for at any rate a limited number of prisoners to emerge from that wire enclosure before the end of the war. At least the injurious influences of long duration may by this means be alleviated. The Swiss nation

may well be proud that it was the first to develop the idea. Whilst Europe is sweltering in blood and fury, our country has demonstrated its will, even at this time, to cherish and foster the ideals of humanity. Switzerland has thereby brilliantly justified her right to existence. Our citizens, overcoming innumerable difficulties and opposition, are creating for thousands of Europeans the possibility of resting, and of recovering their balance, before they are utterly crushed by the injurious effects of that uncertain hoping and waiting, and before the barbed wire has permanently laid them low.

AFTER-WORD.

I should not like to conclude this short study without an optimistic reference to the future. To-day optimism is more vital than ever. We must wrench ourselves free from any pessimism in the contemplation of life. This would unquestionably lead to Nihilism and Bolshevism. Our prisoners in particular, deprived of social life by being driven into these camps, and crushed in spirit by mistrust and anxiety, must be delivered from this dangerous state of mind. Such deliverance will not come through drugs nor through instruction and educational systems. It is above all essential that they should cast anchor again in the harbour of their own homes. The return to the family circle will prove itself the most powerful of remedies. Many

prisoners who were interned in Switzerland have attested to the salutary effects of returning to their kith and kin. Family life is the solid basis of a healthy social mentality. The nature of the occupation, too, is of vital importance.⁵⁵ Most injurious is the factory worker's life, in that it proceeds so monotonously and joylessly. Apart from the depressing conditions of the environment, disputes over wages also bring an element of unrest into the life of the factory worker. On the other hand cultivation of the land is an ideal occupation for the released prisoner. Land cultivation is in itself a noble task; it is of infinite value and binds a man to his native soil. No herded existence with chance acquaintances is involved, no agitation; it is independent of human influence. The advantages of life on the land were long since recognised by all participants in the war. Migration to the land arises from no sentimental cry, "Back to nature," but from the elemental desire for rest, sub-conscious in every individual. Desire for rest lies deep in the soul of man; it will overcome that irritability and doubt, that feverish hoping and waiting, that possesses the soul of the prisoner.

⁵⁵ The observer quoted in footnote 21 states: "The author seems to have less confidence in the good effect of productive labour than is, in my opinion, quite justified."—X.

be lost sight of that the reports quoted in the various extracts that have been given are by intelligent observers, no doubt, yet not by trained investigators belonging to the medical profession. None of the British narratives gives any hint of any research on this point carried out by experts, and perhaps the opportunity has been lost; I am not aware of any investigation of this sort that has been carried out in England. If this side of the medical diseases of the war has been largely ignored, there is adequate material in Dr. Vischer's little volume to provide a basis for future research.

In this connexion perhaps one might draw a certain distinction between the captured soldier and the interned civilian, as, indeed, Dr. Vischer has also done. The latter, in no way to his discredit, may not be animated with quite the same spirit as the soldier; he is not, technically, a fighter, and may find his lot much harder to bear in that he has had no chance, as has the other, of showing his mettle. It would be worth while to endeavour to ascertain the proportion of barbed-wire neurosis cases among civilians and soldiers respectively. The soldier's point of view is well expressed in the following extract:—

“ I wonder if the people at home ever realize that the prisoners in Germany number amongst their ranks some of the greatest heroes of this war. On the battlefield the heroes, or at least some of them, are recognized, and rewarded

accordingly; but the exile is never known, though he fights against far more hopeless odds; for him there is no chance—all is at an end. Fine deeds are done in the heat of action, when the excitement of the moment gives the spur to many a noble act; but it takes a braver and more steadfast spirit to pass smiling and cheerful through the endless, stunted and hopeless days of a prisoner's life, to cheer up those of our comrades who have for the moment fallen into the slough of despondency, and to harass the German guards at every turn in the matter of attempted escape. . . . A holder of the King's Commission must carry out the spirit in which that commission is given—the path of duty, even unto death, in whatever circumstances that path may lie. . . . It is the duty of each able-bodied officer and man to carry out the offensive spirit in every way possible. Some of the men have been magnificent, and have carried this spirit to the highest possible heroism." (Capt. H. G. Gilliland, "My German Prisons.")

It is the steady cultivation of this offensive spirit amid the greatest difficulties and under threats, more particularly in the earlier days of prison camp existence, that has been the salvation, moral and mental, of many a British soldier.

We may be inclined to argue that there is nothing specific in the "disease"; that irritability

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